

Every joyous occasion was celebrated with a “ti-sec” shot of rum, a baked galette—the traditional St Barth bread, or a sweet potato pudding. Accordions, tambourines, and maracas were played and a neighborhood dance was quickly organized. Sunday mass, romantic marriages, and religious processions were occasions to wear your Sunday best or even put on a new outfit. Today, the traditional island costume is worn only for the island’s Saint’s Day or other folkloric events.

Until a few years ago, as one visited the various neighborhoods on the island, it was still possible to glimpse an occasional woman wearing traditional white pleated bonnets.

From the “caleche” and the straw hat worn in Corossol and Colombier to the Panama of Cul-de-Sac, Marigot, or Vitet, each had a different style.

The “caleche” or “Quichenotte,” a large white bonnet, was made in two different ways:

- The “calèche à platine” was made with strips of pleated white fabric sewn together.
- The “calèche à batons” had narrow pieces of wood inserted into the spaces made when the fabric was sewn to shape the bonnet.

There was also the “cape” (the only example of which is in the museum in Gustavia), a hood made of blue fabric for working and black for special occasions. All of this headgear served to protect the wearer from the sun as well as scratches from branches as they collected wood for cooking. They were also extremely useful in keeping impertinent Englishmen and Swedes at a distance, thus the name “Quichenotte” (kiss me not). Straw hats would eventually replace the fabric bonnets.

Architecture of the past and present

The St Barth natives, used to natural catastrophes and especially hurricanes, have always built houses able to resist the strong winds that sweep the island during tropical storms.

You can still see old whitewashed cottages near Marigot and others with



wooden shingles in Corossol. These traditional Saint Barth “cases” always have two structures: the main house which comprises two rooms—the bedroom and the living room—plus a second building nearby, which serves as the kitchen, with a cistern.

Water remains very scarce in Saint Barth, and every drop is always collected. Rain gutters ran into cisterns for the old whitewashed houses—as they do for today’s new villas—or into large pottery jars for the cottages with shingles.



In Gustavia, it is impossible to forget that the island once belonged to Sweden. Many of the Swedish buildings still exist, such as the former town hall, the Brigantine, and the clock tower, built on a stone base with wooden walls. There is also the mysterious Wall House, which has been renovated as home to the territorial library and the island’s heritage museum.

Today, the architecture on the island has changed considerably. While still built to resist hurricanes, stylish modern houses with every convenience and beautiful tourist villas have little by little taken a more prominent place on the landscape of Saint Barth.



A Coat Of Arms For Saint-Barthélemy

In 1977, the national archives asked every French municipality and department to create its own “symbolic crest.” The municipality of Saint Barthélemy contacted a heraldic artist whose specialty was the creation of coats of arms for cities and town. And the coat of arms for Saint Barthélemy was created.

The complex history of Saint Barthélemy left behind many important symbols. Several of them were united into the coat of arms, including:

- Three fleurs-de-lis that represent the French monarchy: marking France’s rule of the island from 1648-1785, and again since 1878, when the island has been part of France.
- The Maltese Cross: illustrating that the island belonged to the Order of Malta from 1651-1665
- The crowns of three Swedish kings: a reminder of the Swedish era of the island, 1785-1878.

Exterior ornaments:

- The gold mural crown representing the Greek goddesses that protected the fortune of a city; used since the Empire period
- Two pelicans to recall the popularity of these birds, which are the mascot of the island.
- The name “OUANALAO” as the Carib Indians called the island of St Barthélemy.

Saint-Barthélemy: An Overseas Collectivity

Saint Barthélemy was a municipality within the department of Guadeloupe, until the promulgation of specific legislation 2007-223 dating from January 21, 2007 (Official Journal January 22), allowed the island to evolve into an Overseas Collectivity as of July 15, 2007.

Administered by a 19-member Territorial Counsel, which comprises a seven-member executive counsel, the Collectivity is led the president of the Territorial Counsel.

Saint-Barthélemy is represented in the French senate by Michel Magras

Official website of the Collectivity: www.comstbarth.com

Geography, flora and fauna

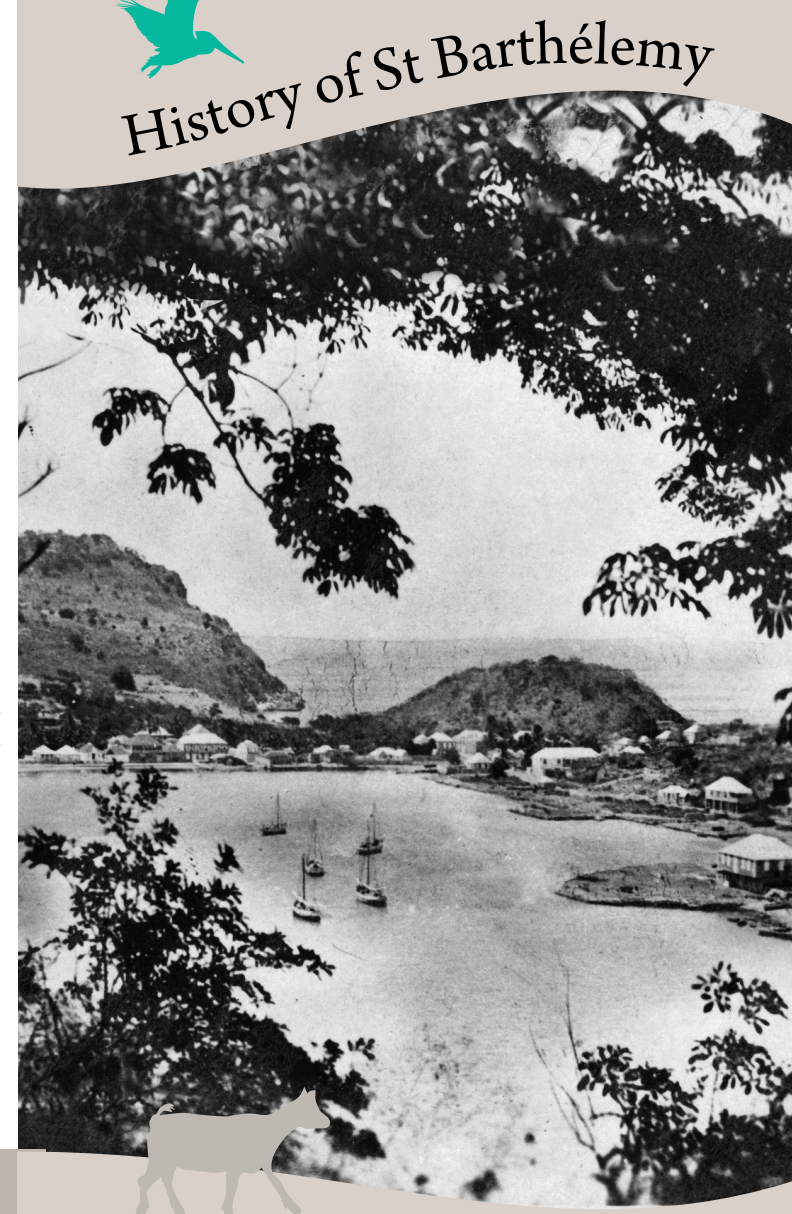


At 8,500 km from Paris and 2,500 km from New York, this small island is located at 17.55° North and 62.50° West. The island of Saint Barthélemy, or Saint Barth for those in the know, is tiny, with a surface of just 8 square miles. The census in 2007 counted 8,398 inhabitants, or 335 residents per square kilometer.

The island’s beautiful coastlines are accented with inlets and bays as well as soft white sand. Considered one of the oldest volcanic islands in the Lesser Antilles chain, its dry, rocky soil does not lend itself to agriculture. Local fauna seems rare, but is actually fairly diverse: iguanas, land and sea turtles, marine birds—including the island mascot, the pelican—pretty hummingbirds, and other small birds in gardens. Flora is more delicate as many flowering plants depend on a lot of water and Saint Barth does not have abundant rainfall, but many homes have watering systems that allow for a proliferation of multicolored flowers.

The climate is considered to be tropical maritime. Air temperatures vary between 80°F in the winter and 86°F in the summer, with highs of 89°F in July and August. Ocean temperatures can be as high as 84°F during the summer. St Barth does not have four seasons as other regions do, but the year is divided into two periods known in French as “Carême” and “Hivernage.” The period of “Carême” runs from December 1 to May 30, with cooler air and lower temperatures. “Hivernage” runs from June 1 through November 30 and is warmer. Between these two periods are the months of September and October, the height of hurricane season.

Photos: Gérard Tessier, Pierre Carreau, Laurent Benoit et Harry Bréjat



Saint-Barthélemy *l'art d'être une île*



Monday to Friday, from 8.30am to 6pm
and Saturday from 8.30am to noon

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From Christopher Columbus to the present



At the age of 14, Christopher Columbus was already a sailor, navigating on the open seas for many years before he set sail for the new world. In addition to his sailing skills, he studied geography and cartography, making one thing certain for this explorer born in Genoa, Italy: The earth is round. He was sure that if he sailed straight west, following the setting sun, he was sure to reach the Indies. To fund his project he needed patrons, so he went to Spain to solicit the support of King Ferdinand and his queen, Isabella the

Catholic. On August 3, 1492, three caravels set sail... the Spanish sovereigns had given him a chance to realize his dreams. Sailing toward the unknown and into stormy seas, he came upon Haiti and Santo Domingo before heading back to Europe.

During his second voyage in 1493, Christopher Columbus sailed past the Lesser Antilles archipelago. He noticed Ouanalao, an uninhabited little island frequented occasionally by the Carib Indians. He renamed the island after his brother Bartholoméo, but as it was not interesting enough for colonists seeking rich new continents full of treasures, he kept going toward other conquests.

Various tribes, from the Amerindians and Caribs to Arawaks and Tainos, defended this tiny island, but eventually could not withstand the force of European settlers, whose guns quickly overcame hatchets made from conch shells. But in 1648 when Monsieur de Longvilliers de Poincy decided to settle the island of Saint Barthélemy, he sent Jacques Gente, along with about 50 men, to establish a colony, which increased in size by way of residents from Saint Christophe, including Master Bonhomme. But the Carib Indians (who used the island as a refuge) massacred this initial group of settlers, and the Europeans abandoned Saint Barthélemy (those who escaped the fury of the Caribs did not want to return).

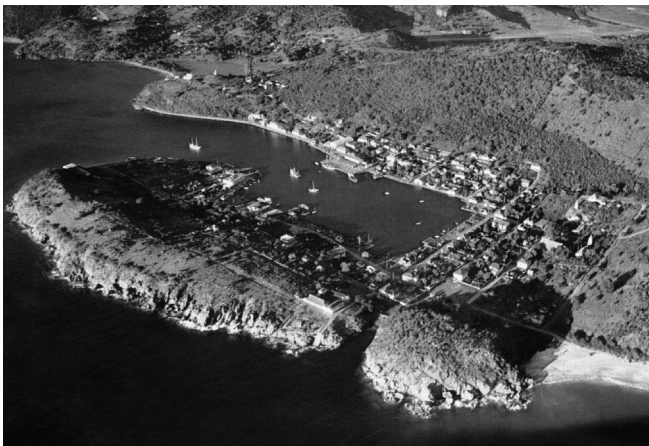
By 1659, peace had been established and Monsieur de Poincy sent a new group of 30 men, primarily natives of Normandy and Brittany. By 1664, the size of the colony had increased to 100 people.

In 1665, The West Indies Company purchased Saint Barthélemy from The Order of Malta. In 1666, the residents of Saint Barth and Saint Martin, against their wishes, were sent back to Saint Christophe. That did not last long as the Saint Barth people quickly returned to their land. In 1674, the island was attached to the colony of Guadeloupe and the French crown. Corsairs, buccaneers, and pirates made it their refuge, and in 1744 the English attacked the island. Certain of the residents set off for islands to the south, but Saint Barth remained a French possession and the residents returned by 1764.

In 1763, Descoudrelle had taken command of the island. His administration was excellent, and the inhabitants were happy with their lot in life. But nothing could stop the flow of history, and in France, King Gustav III of Sweden and French king Louis XVI were concocting a curious destiny for this small island... a warehouse in Gothenburg, Sweden in exchange for Saint Barthélemy. This in 1784 Saint Barthélemy became a Swedish possession. On March 7, 1785, at 11am, the exchange was official, and the island entered an era of prosperity it had never before experienced. King Gustav made good economic decisions and Saint Barthélemy expanded rapidly. The town of Gustavia was born around the small harbor, with its paved streets and three forts: Gustav, Karl, and Oscar, the names of Swedish kinds. The harmonious marriage of stone and wood gave birth to some magnificent buildings, some of which are still extant today: the old town hall, the Swedish clock tower, The Brigantin, the sub-prefecture, and the Wall House as renovated into a museum and library. The port was named Gustavia in honor of the king and made duty-free.

By 1815 the population had reached 5,763 inhabitants. But a few years of war would perturb the island as well as a series of natural catastrophes: repeated droughts, hurricanes, torrential rains, and a terrible fire in 1852 that destroyed the southern part of Gustavia. King Oscar II, frustrated with this little island that caused more trouble than it was worth, finally decided to retrocede it to France. After a popular referendum, Saint Barthélemy once again was of French nationality on March 16, 1878.

Saint Barthélemy enjoyed a discrete period of calm. Dedicated to work and family, life was exhausting but peaceful for the most part. Yet hurricanes, drought, sickness, social troubles, invasions by the English flotilla, and a slave revolt were part of the island's history but did not weaken its resolve to survive. Another problem was that the local economy—based on the export of salt, subsistence farming on the family level, weaving of straw objects, colportage, and raising of animals—could not ensure a decent level of existence for the population. Men began to leave to work on neighboring islands. In some cases, entire families migrated to the American Virgin Islands, primarily St Thomas.



Little by little, progress was made. In spite of economic misery caused by the effect of world wars and the lack of water on the island, life began to take shape. Communal cisterns were built in various neighborhoods, and schools opened their doors in the countryside. Roads began to cut across the mountainous landscapes.

In 1946, Remy de Haënen opened Saint Barth to the outside world by landing the first airplane on the savanna in Saint Jean. At the same time, work was done to modernize the port of Gustavia. As of 1960, students were able to leave the island four or five years later than in the past. They were no longer obliged to set sail on schooners at the age of 11 to go to school, as a new junior high was built in Gustavia. Little by little, comfort timidly made an appearance in local lives.

During the 1980s, Saint Barth expanded rapidly, and little by little tourism began to drive the island's economy. The schools improved. Sports became more popular, changing the local lifestyle. An electric plant brought power to the countryside. The airport was built and has continued to evolve to this day. Other major improvements also saw the light of day.

The island continued to evolve. The subject of environmental protection became essential as the population continued to grow: from 2,491 inhabitants in 1974 to at least 9,000 today.

Religion and Spirituality

Anglican, Evangelist, or Catholic, the population of Saint Barthélemy is attached to various religions.

The Catholic religion, the most widespread on the island, has been passed down from father to son over many generations, and there are two Catholic Churches:

- Notre-Dame de L'Assomption in Gustavia
- Notre-Dame de l'Assomption in Lorient

There are also two Catholic schools:

- Ecole Sainte Marie in Colombier
- Ecole Saint Joseph in Lorient

There is also a small community chapel in Colombier, opened by Père De Bruyn for the faithful in the northern neighborhoods.

The island also has an Anglican Church and an Evangelist Temple. This allows each religious community to pray together according to one's personal faith. There are certain ceremonies or family events that unite the churches in an ecumenical service.



Beliefs

As is true around the world, the natives of Saint Barth also have their legends and their beliefs. Although not as strong as with people on other Caribbean islands, some old time legends persist, most frequently little family rituals. And even if not always believed, they tend to be passed on from generation to generation.

A few examples:

- Sweeping too soon after the departure of a guest can keep them from coming back.
- The kestrel (Falco tinnunculus) is a bird that is thought to predict an impending birth. It is the first to notice if a woman is pregnant, and lets everyone know by chirping with insistence, its beak turned toward her house. On other occasions, it has a different song, which might indicate death.
- A garden snake found near a house could mean that a baby will be born into the family.
- If a woman has blond highlights, her baby will be a boy, if the highlights are black, it will be a girl (So why have a sonogram?)



- To sleep with a chickpea pod under your pillow lets you dream of your future husband.
- A hen that sings like a rooster brings misfortune. And so on...

Generally speaking, netherworld creatures such as jumbies, zombies, phantoms, and other myths of the West Indies do not have much influence in Saint Barth.



Tradition and Culture

The population of Saint Barth remains very conservative, proud of its lineage. But don't be fooled by false impressions: the inhabitants of Saint Barth seem reserved, yet are much friendlier than they appear. Tradition is most important during important family events: births, baptisms, First Communion, engagements, marriages, or funerals.

During the 19th century, when the island lived its quiet little life, young men did not hesitate to court young women, but always discretely, as the eye of the watchful chaperone caught any signs of overdoing it.